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ACTIVE PARKLAND

Cooperative, staged development of the C&D Canal is best

U.S. Rep. Mike Castle has renewed his proposal to create active parkland along the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal. It's a good idea and deserves the support of the state of Delaware and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which owns and operates the waterway and the adjoining property.

The canal has traditionally been seen as dividing Delaware into the urban north and the more rural south. But Rep. Castle's proposal could help to unify Delawareans. As growth continues south of the canal in all three counties, the need for more recreational space grows too.

Waterways are always an attraction. Look at the extended bike and walkway along the Delaware River in New Castle; it's always in use. Or Wilmington's Riverfront along the Christina, which is a thriving business, entertainment and recreational area.

There is limited access to an unimproved roadway along some parts of the canal. And there is a marina near Summit, but Rep. Castle would transform the area into a 13-mile pathway that could be a truly active park. Cyclists and runners would certainly use such a facility. And walkers and bird watchers would find it appealing. The opportunity to get close to the canal when the giant ships plow through would make it particularly appealing to youngsters.

In Massachusetts, the Cape Cod Canal provides a similar shortcut for shipping headed to and from Boston as the C & D Canal does for ships bound for Baltimore. Years ago the Corps of Engineers made most of the land along that canal accessible to people, who can be found there all year long.

Cost could be a problem, but it shouldn't be a barrier. The way to proceed is with a staged, cooperative, state-federal plan to first build the pathway and, later, a visitors' center and interactive displays. It's estimated just building the path would cost \$2.6 million. A feasibility study would run about \$150,000. These are not big numbers given the amount of recreational potential the canal banks hold. Sens. Biden and Carper support Rep. Castle's idea. They should all put their muscle behind the request for study money.